



No. VI.—THE STORY OF MR. FLAXMAN LOW.

THE very extraordinary dealings between Mr. Flaxman Low and the late Dr. Kalmarkane have from time to time formed the nucleus of much comment in the press. This is partly the reason for the narration of the present story, which may safely be said to be the first true account of those passages which have provoked so much contention.

It has been urged that Mr. Flaxman Low was vastly to blame as the person upon whom lies the onus of the very remarkable termination to the affair.

That is a matter for the reader to judge of when he has carefully perused the facts which we have endeavoured to set forth in the following pages. We have related in a preceding issue of this magazine an account of the one previous occasion on which Flaxman Low was brought face to face with Dr. Kalmarkane's strange influence. This was in the matter of the young doctor, Gerald d'Imiran, at that time assistant to Dr. Kalmarkane, whom Dr. Kalmarkane endeavoured to murder under circumstances which left no doubt in Flaxman Low's mind of the extraordinary powers attained by his great enemy.

It was in the closing days of January that Mr. Flaxman Low, while attending a special meeting of an Anglo-American Society of Psychological Students—on which occasion he read a very remarkable paper on the three-fold aspect of the soul as regarded from the ancient Egyptian standpoint—perceived amongst the audience the massive head with

its wild aureole of hair, which distinguished Dr. Kalmarkane.

After the meeting Mr. Flaxman Low drove home to his chambers, where some five minutes later he received Dr. Kalmarkane's card. He was a good deal surprised at the proffered visit, knowing what he did of the morose and solitary habits of his visitor. This interview proved to be the first episode in a strange train of events, which directly connected Mr. Low with that formidable and relentless man. Probably it had early become apparent to Kalmarkane that there was no room for Mr. Low upon his path, and that the interview we are about to relate merely brought matters to a head; however, that may be, we must proceed first to hint at an extraordinary offer made by Dr. Kalmarkane to Flaxman Low, and afterwards to describe, as far as it is within the province of words to describe, the singular series of circumstances resultant therefrom.

Kalmarkane strode in hatted and cloaked, his stooping, gaunt figure seeming to dwarf the proportions of the room. He nodded slightly to Low, and then his eyes ranged slowly round, as if by the aid of his surroundings, to gain some insight into the character of his host. Meanwhile Low recognised the fidelity of d'Imiran's word-portrait of Kalmarkane. "A hirsute giant with a tremendous frame, raw-boned and ungainly. He has a long, strong, fleshy nose, a shock head of dark grey hair, and a ragged beard, which

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he is in the habit of twisting into spirals as he talks."

As Kalmarkane turned to speak to Flaxman Low, his big hairy hand went up into his beard.

"I have come," he said, "in order to tell you that I was greatly interested in your paper of this afternoon. You have reached a point attained by few before you.—By-the-way, how old are you?"

Mr. Low, in some surprise, answered.

"Ah," said Kalmarkane, "I am by fifteen years your senior, and I think I may say quite as many years in advance of you in that special branch of knowledge, to which we have both chosen to devote ourselves.—Are you sure that we cannot be overheard? I have a certain proposal to lay before you. Let me advise you to give it your careful consideration."

Mr. Low having replied suitably, Kalmarkane went on.

"I came here intending to warn you to draw the line of your studies at the precise point where you find yourself to-day."

"May I inquire why?"

"You have an intellect of a very high order, as well as strength and audacity, and these qualities might hold you safely where you now stand. One step further the whole aspect of your position changes."

"I do not pretend to misunderstand you," replied Flaxman Low. "But all knowledge is good, if applied only to legitimate ends."

Kalmarkane broke in stormily.

"However we may choose to designate our motives, the final aim of every man is to secure individual power! When you shall have learnt the ultimate secret of power, can you answer for yourself that you will never use that power to secure your own ends? Listen! Give me your word that you will reveal nothing of what I am about to say to you, and—and I have no doubt but that we can work very well together."

Thereupon followed in plain but pregnant words an offer to share with Mr. Low the final and immense result of his lifelong toil on certain conditions. Mr. Low listened as his companion flung out each forcible, trenchant sentence; but when he had heard a

part of Kalmarkane's communication, stopped him with a deliberate and definite refusal.

Kalmarkane wrenched at his beard.

"Take time to think; for if you now refuse what I offer, neither heaven nor hell can help you!"

"I have decided," was Low's answer.

"This is d'Imiran's work!" said Kalmarkane furiously. "I warn you——!"

"I do not see," said Low, rising, "that we shall either of us gain much by prolonging this interview, and you may be very sure that you are dealing with a man who does not permit threats. And will you allow me in my turn to warn you? You forget, Dr. Kalmarkane, that though there seems no limit to human knowledge, there will always be—as long as body and soul are interdependent—a close-set limit to mortal power."

Kalmarkane swung towards the door.

"I came here entirely in your interests," he said, "and I now add also in your interests," he ended, with a snarl, "that I do not warn twice."

In a day or two Mr. Low had completely forgotten Kalmarkane's strange visit, being engrossed in further abstruse and deeply interesting investigations on the lines suggested by the paper he had read at the meeting before mentioned. In the course of a fortnight, however, he began to recognise that a new and untoward mental condition was gradually becoming habitual with him, even to the extent of interfering in a serious manner with his hours of study.

Whether its source lay in mind or body was difficult to determine. Mr. Flaxman Low says that he first became conscious of something wrong by noticing that the amount of work he usually got through between the hours of ten p.m. and two a.m. was growing perceptibly less and less, and that the notes made by him during that interval were of a comparatively valueless character. For a day or two he fancied he that he must have become sleepy in the middle of his reading, and hence the absence of usual results. The next step was to perceive that at all other times, excepting between the hours named, his work, on retrospective examination, was of normal quality and quantity. Thus it was evident that the attacks of mind-vacuity recurred at



Kaimarkane
swung towards
the door.

regular intervals, and he resolved to watch these intervals.

Accordingly, on the night of the 30th January, he placed his books before him as usual, and waited. Almost exactly at midnight he was seized with a feeling of overwhelming despondency, which grew into a condition of resentful frenzy as he brooded helplessly and miserably over some unknown wrong. This phase in its turn passed imperceptibly away, and Flaxman Low found himself reading in his usual manner when the clock struck three, and recalled him to a full consciousness of what his intention had been when he sat down to work. Think as he might, however, a large part of the intervening hours only supplied dim and unsatisfactory memories.

As time went on, these attacks recurred more frequently. The harder he endeavoured to work, the less he seemed to accomplish. His writing began to lose character, many of

the letters were slurred; his faculty for close study deserted him, which he felt the more as he was at the time engaged upon some minute and intricate work in connection with a half-defaced Ptolemaic inscription.

At first he was inclined to believe that his health was perhaps to blame for these strange lapses, but in time it grew clear that his mind was at intervals burdened by alien thoughts superimposed upon his own. In other words he could not concentrate his attention upon his work because he was busy thinking of something else. But what that other subject or subjects could be, he had only a very general notion. His brain was filled with memories which eluded him, memories of some vague and awful unhappiness, a sense of help-

less revolt against some crushing fate, but all dim and undefinable.

In the intervals when he possessed himself and could follow out his own train of thought, his position absolutely horrified him, and he resolved time after time to throw off this mysterious ailment by sheer effort of will. For some ten days or more his mental attitude was one of tense resistance, at the end of which time, though physically exhausted, he had in a great measure thrown off his spiritual incubus.

But a further phase of his remarkable sequence of experiences was close upon him. One night, when walking home from his club, he felt that he was being followed. On looking round he saw no one in the deserted street but a policeman at a distant corner. He walked on more rapidly, his pursuer keeping pace with him. He knew those other footsteps fell in exact unison with his own, and that if he could but stop a fraction

of a second sooner he must hear them. He hurried on, and shut the door of his chambers behind him with a sigh of relief, which even at the time struck him as ludicrous and unnecessary. Merely waiting to take off his overcoat, Mr. Low sat down at once to work, refusing to allow himself to think over his latest experience.

He believes he was reading when he found himself glancing quickly back to catch sight of the face that had been peering over his shoulder, but he was too late. This happened more than once.

Soon the permanent impression of a haunting presence grew intolerable. Day and night he was never alone, never free from the consciousness of that other intelligence oppressing his own, and by degrees it usurped his thinking powers, seeming to suck from his brain all independent mentality, and to use it solely for its own weird and elusive ponderings.

He knows that he struggled continuously but feebly to rid himself of the tyranny of the thoughts, which were not his thoughts, but those of that hateful personality that dogged him. He always knew that had he looked up, or back, or turned, or stopped a fraction of a second sooner, he must have seen, or heard, or felt his tracker; but he was always by that same fraction of a second too late. On retrospection he now recognises that time after time his intangible companion drove him into situations where by a hair's breadth only he escaped death. If the reader will for a moment place himself in Flaxman Low's position and imagine himself possessed by an intelligence determined to wreck him body and mind, he will readily perceive how terrible was a life of which the most ordinary conditions teemed with danger.

Through the long February nights he struggled and waited, set in his resolve to defeat this mysterious influence by sheer, solid effort of will.

At this period there happened to be a sudden burst of bright weather, and Mr. Flaxman Low made up his mind to go over to Paris for a week for change of air and scene, for he was still inclined, during moments of sunshine and activity, to put down his experiences to some physical

origin. In Paris he felt better, and often forgot his late troubles. He went out a good deal and saw many friends, M. Thierry amongst others; and, altogether, returned to London feeling fit to face most difficulties that could present themselves.

He attacked his neglected work with fresh vigour, and a delightful sense of recovered power. One night he placed his books and papers in order, and made the one other arrangement which always accompanied a long spell of tough work. It is Flaxman Low's habit to fill and place in readiness a succession of pipes in the rack above his head. He apportions them to the amount of work he intends to do, and while his mind is delving in the lore of Egypt, his fingers lay pipe after pipe aside until as many as ten yawn black or ashy from the tray. On this occasion he worked and smoked as usual.

It was long past midnight, and the empty streets lay silent but for the passing of some stray hansom at long intervals. All at once the silence seemed ghastly to Flaxman Low as he stood and looked heavily out of his window. Why he had risen from his chair he could not recall, and the hours since his return from the club had been full, not of work, but of indistinct, puzzling dreams. He knew also that the haunting presence had returned. Never before had he felt its nearness so acutely, nor with the same degree of shrinking repugnance. To-night it almost seemed as if his unseen companion were tangible to the touch, and the perplexing sensation of loss of personality grew upon him as the mysterious presence, pressing closer, usurped the active functions of his brain to brood over some blind, far-off, uncomprehended wrong.

He remembers pushing outwards with his arms as a man might make way for himself in a crowd, and returning hurriedly to his desk. There was a sickly smell in the air, which was known to him, but which he failed to specify. He lit another pipe—the sixth as he afterwards had reason to believe—and sat down to his work. After that his recollections became intermittent. He was taking up another pipe, dreams and thoughts beyond all power of description were crowding upon him. He was struggling with drowsiness—then he was leaning back in his

chair, and eyes were looking down into his own, dark eyes, full of hatred and despair, that carried with them the meaning and the memory of those long, vague, unhappy thoughts—he found himself considering the strange, conical cap his companion wore; it was of some woollen material, and thickly covered with short, loose threads, every one of which ended in a knot—then the shadowy eyes, full of compelling hatred, again held his gaze—

Late in the afternoon of the next day he woke to find himself staring at the ceiling of his bedroom, which seemed to sink and recede as he looked upwards. A deadly inertia overcame him until presently the clock struck five. Recollection began to flow back upon him; he knew he must have slept for fifteen hours. It all came to him now—the beautiful, malignant eyes, and the slender, dark fingers laid upon his brow while his brain swung and reeled into sleep.

By some connection of ideas, Flaxman Low involuntarily looked down at his own hand. Upon his right forefinger was a brown stain. Raising it closer to examine it more thoroughly, he inhaled the same faint, sickly odour that had pervaded his experience of last night. His mind, working sluggishly, hit at length upon the explanation, and the thought sent him reeling from his bed.

Steadying himself by a chair, he looked through a case of drugs which stood beside

the door. A bottle of powerful tincture of opium was missing. He staggered into the next room and to the table at which he was in the habit of working. The missing bottle stood uncorked among his papers, half empty.

A horrible suspicion flashed across his mind. One of his pipes still remained unsmoked, and it reeked of opium. Others—the sixth and seventh in order upon the tray—were full of ashes, but the tell-tale odour hung about them still. Mr. Low took up the bottle, and for a moment wonder held him—

wonder at the rare strength of constitution that had carried him safely through an ordeal under which most men must have sunk.

To a wiry constitution, a clean life, and regular and wholesome habits, he owed the privilege of standing there alive.

After throwing the windows wide, he began to pace the room. He understood now the unaccountable mental lapses of the last few weeks. Some intelligence, other than his own, possessed him at intervals, and, taking advantage of the routine of his life and his ordinary habits, had used his own hands to compass his death. He

detailed to himself the many escapes he had lately had, and the commonplace events which had led up to them. This brought him to the most important question of all. Who could be the author of so subtle a plot? It is worthy of remark that the possibility of Kalmarkane being connected with it did not at once strike him.

It was at this juncture that Flaxman Low at



Then the shadowy eyes again held his gaze

length acknowledged the absolute need of some human co-operation and assistance. The experience of last night might recur at any time, and the idea that the thing was not possible but probable sent him once more striding rapidly up and down the floor. He ran over the list of his friends and acquaintances, and he began to be sorry there was so little faith left in the world.

D'Imiran had said something similar. Ah, d'Imiran! The name opened up a new vista of thought. Kalmarkane! In a moment the whole affair became clear to him. Turning to the books he had been using on the previous evening, he examined the marginal notes last written. The few broken sentences bore no connection whatever with the text, but they seemed the echo of those dreams of despair and wrong which had of late worked beneath and independent of his objective consciousness. We may add that these remarkable sentences formed the basis of much subsequent investigation on the part of Mr. Low.

In a very few minutes Flaxman Low had decided on his course of action. First he must see d'Imiran, since d'Imiran was the only man who would believe such strange experiences possible, and was also the only man in a position to give him much necessary information, and perhaps combine with him in the effort he was about to make to shake off for ever the yoke which Dr. Kalmarkane's incredible powers had forced upon him. He looked up the address d'Imiran had given him, and in an hour was hastening thither in a hansom. D'Imiran was in town, but chanced to be out, and Mr. Low left a note for him.

MY DEAR D'IMIRAN,—If you can possibly manage it, I should like to see you to-night. If you could come over between seven and eight, we might dine together.—Yours very truly,

FLAXMAN LOW.

He walked back to his rooms across the park, and several men who met him on the way remarked that he was looking very seedy.

Once at home, he had nothing to do but to wait for d'Imiran. During the whole of this time he was slowly coming to a conclusion.

"I should have been to see you before had



A bottle of powerful tincture of opium was missing.

I not had a very strong reason for staying away," were d'Imiran's first words. "But now that you have sent for me I am very glad to have the opportunity of meeting you again."

"Ah, Kalmarkane, I suppose?"

"Yes, Kalmarkane."

"He objected to our meeting? For what reason?"

"He appeared to have strong ones," replied d'Imiran with manifest hesitation; "and it seemed to me that it might be well, both for your sake and my own, to do as he wished."

"I don't know what you may think about that when you have heard my story," said Low. "I had an interview with Kalmarkane about a month ago, and on that occasion he threatened me, and you will, I fancy, agree with me that he has fully carried out his words."

Thereupon Mr. Low narrated his experiences, adding:

"And now you will perceive there is no time to be lost. To-night I go to Crow-

sedge. I do not know whether you will feel equal to accompanying me."

D'Imiran kicked the fender savagely.

"How do you connect Kalmarkane with all this? He is capable of anything, as I have good reason to believe, but —"

"I am quite willing to tell you what I suspect," replied Mr. Low. "I have told you of the visit he paid me; during that visit he offered to share his secret with me on the condition that I co-operated with him in his horrible schemes. From that time I date my troubles. Let us take the events: my loss of brain power, my strange periods of possession, and finally my incomprehensible lapse of last night. I believe that Kalmarkane is using some parasite intelligence to prey upon and wreck my mind and body. I have no doubt that if I do not act at once his next attack will be fatal."

"If you knew as much as I do, I think you would hesitate to go to Crowsedge. What do you intend to do there?"

"My dear d'Imiran, you will understand that there are matters between myself and Dr. Kalmarkane which must be settled once and for all! — On second thoughts, it may be rash to ask you to accompany me."

Flaxman Low rose and slipped a revolver from a drawer into his pocket. D'Imiran, still kicking at the fender, watched the significant action.

"Yes," said Low, in reply to d'Imiran's glance. "It may come to that. At any rate,

I am resolved that the settlement between us to-night shall be in one way or another a final one."

D'Imiran's answer was to get his hat. Mr. Low put out his hand.

"I'm going too," said d'Imiran. "I have also, as you know, one or two questions to settle with Dr. Kalmarkane."

The night mail landed the two men at a station not more than six miles from Crowsedge. D'Imiran, who knew the country well, started along the dark road seawards. The salt wind blew in their faces as they walked on rapidly through the star-

less, windy night. After a time, they left the high road and struck into a stony track across the heath. Now and then as they topped a rise, they could see a flash-light far out at sea, but on the land all was black and lonely, and nothing was to be heard but the dry rustling



Presently, d'Imiran pointed to a distant light.

of the heather as the strong gusts swept over it.

Presently, d'Imiran pointed to a distant light.

"Crowsedge," he said.

They stumbled on in silence till the thunder of the ground-swell on the coast could be distinctly heard. They were now approaching the house, and d'Imiran remarked that the light was burning in Kalmarkane's study.

They felt their way in the pitchy darkness round to the house-door, which they found unlocked. Then, passing through halls and rooms, they emerged into the lower portion

of the tower, where above them at the head of the flight of stone steps, a slip of light showed about the door-frame of Kalmarkane's study.

"What do you intend to do?" asked d'Imiran in a low voice.

"Give him a choice," replied Low, as he mounted the steps.

Kalmarkane was seated at his desk, and looked up with a flare of angry surprise visible in his eyes.

"What has brought you here?" he said. "Have you come to tell me that you have reconsidered my proposal?"

"On the contrary," replied Flaxman Low, "I have come to discuss very thoroughly those other matters that are open between us."

"I have shown you that my boasting was not altogether vain," returned Kalmarkane derisively. "You taunted me with the limits set for mortal men. I have effectually answered you! It is by a mere chance that you are alive at this moment. I am still only learning my powers, but I promise you not to fail a second time! Man, think what you have refused! I have grasped the supreme secret, which has been sought so eagerly but not found; the secret of the mother-force of nature—cosmic ether! All other forces—electricity, magnetism, heat—are but secondary. I assert that as men have found means to make these secondary forces subserve their purposes, so have I discovered how to control the primal force, for the human Will is above all.

"I have sufficiently demonstrated that I have power, and I can prove that all force is Will-force, acting by and through the vibrations of ether. What are thoughts and emotions but etheric vibrations? And since man can control thought, the conclusion is perfectly logical that he can control the ether. This makes him absolute

master not only of the material world, but of those other influences lying beyond its borders!"

"And yet you are only a man," said Low, covering Kalmarkane as he spoke with his revolver. "And as man to man we must deal with each other."

Kalmarkane smiled.

"I give you a choice," went on Low, "I will either shoot you as you sit there or——"

"Shooting means the gallows for my murderer."

"Possibly, but as the law cannot help me, I must take its functions into my own hands. As an alternative, I suggest that you make a little journey with me abroad, where we can even up our differences as men. This was, I believe, the course adopted by Busner and Wolff, as you probably remember, some three years ago."

D'Imiran has given a graphic description of that scene. Low no longer was the scholar and the man of science, he was the elemental



"I give you a choice," went on Low.

man, ready to abide by the law of the stronger hand. Kalmarkane sat silent, the drops gathering on his furrowed forehead, as he glared savagely at the pistol barrel, which gave Flaxman Low the right to dictate to him.

"You have just sixty seconds to decide in," said Low.

"You have given yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble," answered Kalmarkane at last. "I will be glad to shoot you when and where you will!"

"That is well; the sooner we start then the better, for we don't part, Dr. Kalmarkane, until this affair is finished. D'Imiran will act for me. Pray let me know what are your wishes."

Kalmarkane scowled heavily.

"I have a friend, a Count Julowski, who understands matters of this sort extremely well. He is now at Calais. There is a little cove down the coast there, which will suit our purpose admirably," he replied shortly.

There is no need to give here any description of the journey and crossing to Calais, nor of the many precautions taken by Mr. Low. Suffice it is to say that the duel was arranged under severe and even murderous conditions, at the express instance of the two principals. The distance was to be twelve paces and the shots alternate.

On the way to the spot arranged for the meeting, d'Imiran could not control his desire to ask Flaxman Low one or two questions.

"You were able to put forward a very plausible theory in the case of the Brown Hand," he said. "What do you make out of your own experience?"

"There are one or two possible explanations," returned Flaxman Low, "but the one which most satisfactorily coincides with the events is that which I fancy I have mentioned to you already. Kalmarkane appears to have obtained power over some disembodied spirit whose intelligence he uses to further his own purposes. If you consider the chain of events—my unaccountable depression, the intervals of half-suspended consciousness during which my annotatory writings bore the same stamp of vague desperation, and, lastly, my attempt to make away with myself by adding opium to my pipes—I say if you con-

sider all these things, they certainly point to the probability that a parasite intelligence was acting upon and usurping my mental and physical faculties. This theory covers all the facts."

"But how came Kalmarkane to have influence over a spirit?"

"I am driven to believe that he has discovered not only the secret of etheric energy, but also how to make that energy subservient to the directed will. Did he not boast to you that *all* power resides in the mind of the man who knows how to make his will effectual in the spiritual as in the physical world? Because I believe in that power and Kalmarkane's unscrupulous use of it, I am here to-day."

"If you were aware that he had so much dangerous power," said d'Imiran, "why did you allow him the chance of fighting? I should have shot him down on sight. By your action you are submitting tremendous issues to the lottery of a duel. I cannot think you are well advised."

"One does not readily bring oneself to shoot an unarmed man, and as to his escaping, I hope, my dear d'Imiran, to render that impossible by the stringency of the conditions under which I had resolved the matter should be decided. He may, and most probably will, succeed in revenging himself; but I can assure you that we will go together, and I do not think that either here or hereafter the death of Dr. Kalmarkane is likely to weigh too heavily upon my conscience."

Such was the conversation between d'Imiran and Flaxman Low as they drove to the appointed place of meeting.

The affair came off in the little cove already alluded to. The gusty breeze had risen to a gale when the combatants stood up between wind and sea. We cannot give any prolonged account of how luck favoured Kalmarkane, who, securing the first shot, brought Mr. Low to the ground, nor of how Flaxman Low, with his bleeding shoulder and right arm dangling useless, fired from the ground, his bullet entering Kalmarkane's brain; nor of how Kalmarkane's great form stood upright for a moment, his finger twitching on the trigger, till he plunged forward shoulder-first into the sand.

That ten minutes upon the Calais coast has been widely discussed in the papers, and we can only hope that this story will clear Mr. Low from the accusations of savagery that have from time to time been forced upon him. His action in this matter, as in all others, was, we venture to contend, dictated by that highmindedness which has always formed one of his most prominent characteristics.

It is a somewhat significant fact that at the sale of Dr. Kalmarkane's effects d'Imiran purchased an ancient oblong box, which was found to contain a bronze bracelet (of which d'Imiran already possessed the fellow), and also a conical woollen cap furred on the outside with little knotted threads.

Of the strange series of experiences in which Dr. Gerald d'Imiran and Mr. Flaxman

Low were participators, it is difficult to determine how much may have been due to hypnotic or kindred influences, and how much was naked fact.

Of the secrets possessed by Dr. Kalmarkane, Mr. Flaxman Low can still do no more than indicate the drift. Whether the scientific formula will ever come to light is another matter; at any rate, for the present, the knowledge rests with Dr. Kalmarkane in his grave.

In these stories we are afraid it has only been possible to give a very slight and cursory account of the pursuits and character of Flaxman Low. Some day, perhaps, they may be resumed, for who shall say how far his hand shall reach into a science, amongst the exponents of which we are certainly justified in calling his the first great name.



Kalmarkane's great form stood upright for a moment, his finger twitching on the trigger.